79th Plenary Meeting – Virtual

MINUTES

World Café: Challenges and Opportunities for Sustainability
Fortifying the Cotton Supply Chain

10:10 am (GMT-5) to 11:10 am, Wednesday 8 December 2021
Chairman: Mr Mike McCue, ICAC Communications Director

Mr McCue welcomed attendees and explained the structure and purpose of the World Café, which is designed to be much more interactive than traditional sessions. Ten different moderators held their own roundtable discussions prior to the meeting then shared the highlights from their discussions:

- At his English-speaking table, Mr Allan Williams of the Cotton Research & Development Corporation discussed implementing a global, common sustainability measurement system; whether it is possible to convey the sustainability metrics to the fabric a consumer purchases; and strategies to score and label blended fabrics.
- Mr Alvaro Moreira of the Better Cotton Initiative conducted his roundtable in Portuguese and addressed the main elements of cotton sustainability; what metrics should be adopted; and how the industry can better support farmers.
- Dr Bruno Bachelier of CIRAD, whose roundtable was held in French, discussed the challenges of measuring sustainable production systems; what stakeholders are responsible for sustainability; indicators of soil health; and social sustainability.
- Mr Manish Daga of CottonGuru conducted his roundtable in Hindi and discussed the responsibilities of stakeholders, specifically addressing who those stakeholders are, as well as the impact of sustainable production practices on climate change.
- Mr Mark Messura of Cotton Incorporated held a roundtable in English; topics included what people in the cotton production and value chains are most vulnerable; how to measure sustainability; and how to incorporate a positive social impact into cotton production and processing.
- Dr Mohamed Negm of ICRA organised a roundtable in Arabic, in which participants focussed on why all sectors of the supply chain are seeking greater sustainability; what sustainability means in the context of climate change; and the three main pillars of sustainability (economic, environmental and social).
- Dr Robert Jou of the Taiwan coordinated two roundtables in Chinese and the group focussed on stakeholder responsibilities; the meaning of economic sustainability; climate change; and how to score sustainability, traceability and labelling.
• Mr Marco Mtunga of the Tanzania Cotton Board convened a table of eight participants that concentrated on the need for small holder farmer training; the engagement of retailers with their suppliers; and a scheme in which all sectors of the cotton supply chain share in the benefits of sustainability.

• Dr Marcelo Paytas of INTA convened nearly 20 individuals for his discussion in Spanish. Among the topics of interest were the need to leverage the media to communicate clearly with consumers; the importance of developing common measuring systems for benchmarking and comparison; and how to overcome challenges including climate change; water availability; obsolete machinery and the difficulty in providing technical training and funding for inputs to small holder farmers.

• Professor Oybek Kimsanbaev of Volgograd University, whose table spoke Russian, emphasised the importance of actionable science and data in cotton industry development; as well as strategies for protecting and improving the soil quality in Russia and Uzbekistan.

During the Q&A session:

Dr Bachelier was asked how more people could be made aware of the indicators from the ICAC’s Expert Panel on Social, Environmental & Economic Performance (SEEP). He responded that indeed, SEEP indicators should be better known throughout the industry and added that while not all indicators are useful in Africa, they are working to make them better-known through CIRAD, the French agricultural research and cooperation organisation.

When asked what the level of stakeholder awareness was regarding climate change, Mr Daga said that the farther down the supply chain they looked, the less aware they found people were. Farmers seem to be aware of the growing risk, he explained, but retailers and brands knew very little and consumers even less — something that should serve as a wake-up call for the cotton industry. Dr Negm also replied, warning that if detailed information isn’t provided to consumers on the labels of textile products, they simply won’t buy them in the future. Even indirectly, he concluded, it is the consumer who will be driving all other stakeholders to take action.

When asked about the status of stakeholder awareness in the cotton supply chain, Prof Kimsanbaev replied that there is a critical need to disseminate information more reliably because many cotton growers in Central Asia are unaware of the Better Cotton Initiative and other industry standards.

Dr Paytas, when queried as to why not all Latin and Caribbean countries were part of a formal sustainability programme, said that the feeling amongst the members of his table was that the current initiatives were less focussed on certain countries, such as those that have low productivity in the field. He added that the industry as a whole needs to improve its networking and collaboration between associations to benefit small farmers and until that happens, it will be a major concern for countries in this region.

With time having expired, Mr McCue thanked all of the participants and closed the session.